



America's Less Fortunate

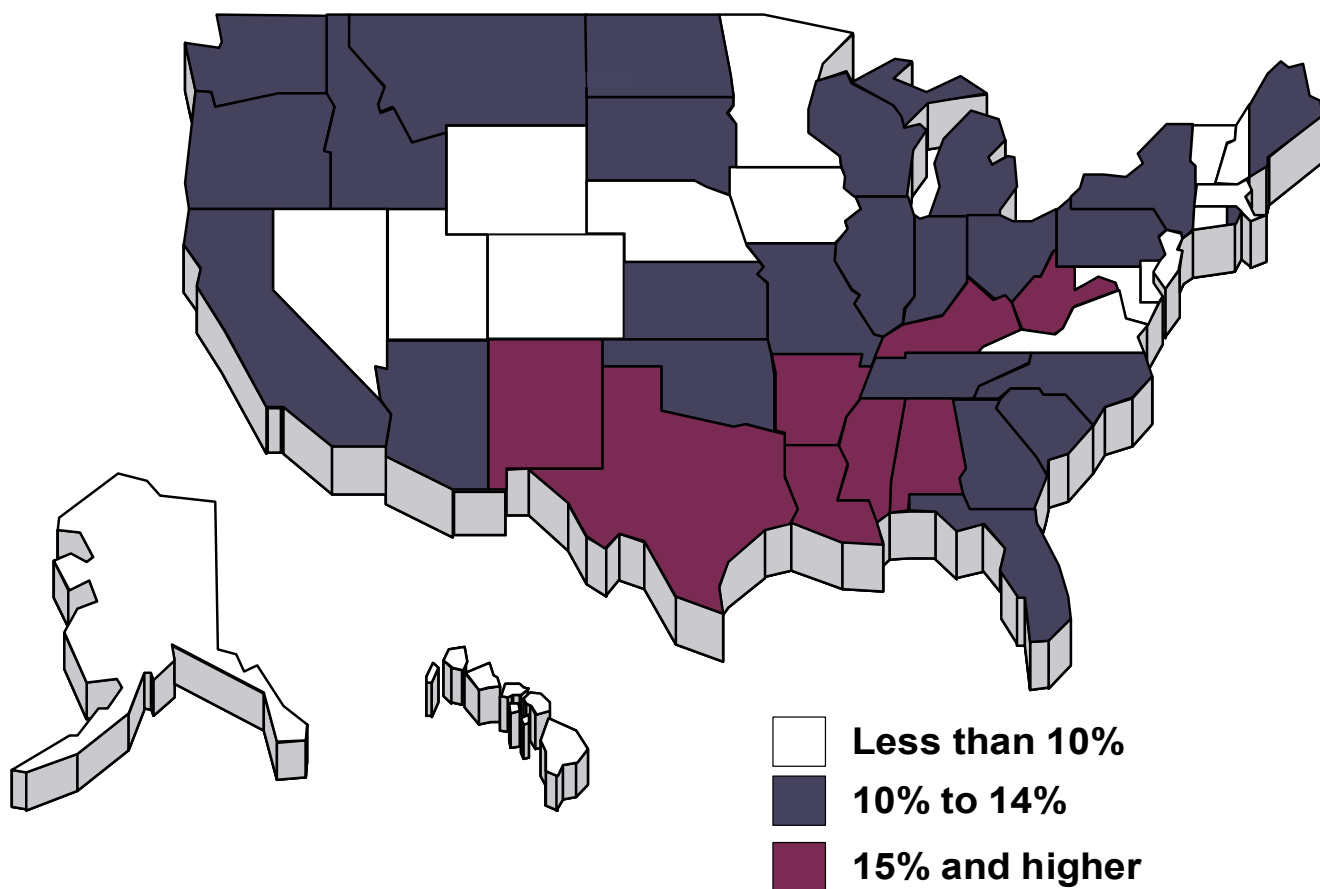
Although poverty is not absent within the United States, improvements have been made in our lifetime. The United States Census Bureau began tracking poverty rates in 1959. At that time, nearly one-quarter of the country's population was classified in poverty. The aggressive anti-poverty policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations appear to have had their positive effects, with the poverty rate dropping by a half, to around 12 percent in 1974. But that is as low as we have gone. With some periods of fluctuation, the most recent measurement for 2004 places U.S. poverty at 12.7 percent of the population.

The numbers represent the nation as a whole. However, our nation is culturally multifaceted, and we know that not all facets perform equally. Poverty is not an equal-opportunity condition. If we look at America's families, those headed by a married couple have a poverty rate of only 5.5 percent. Single parents, on the other hand, paint a contrast. Families with a male householder, no wife present, have a poverty rate of 13.5 percent. Families with just a female householder, no husband present, have a more striking rate of 28.4 percent.

We also see differences based upon our racial and ethnic breakdowns. Whites have the lowest rate at 10.5 percent. The Asian population is right there also, with a rate of 10.6 percent. Rates get more disparate after that. Poverty for American Indians and Alaska Natives is more than double at 24.3 percent, and Blacks at 24.4 percent. On a purely ethnic basis, the rate for people of Hispanic origin is 22.1 percent.

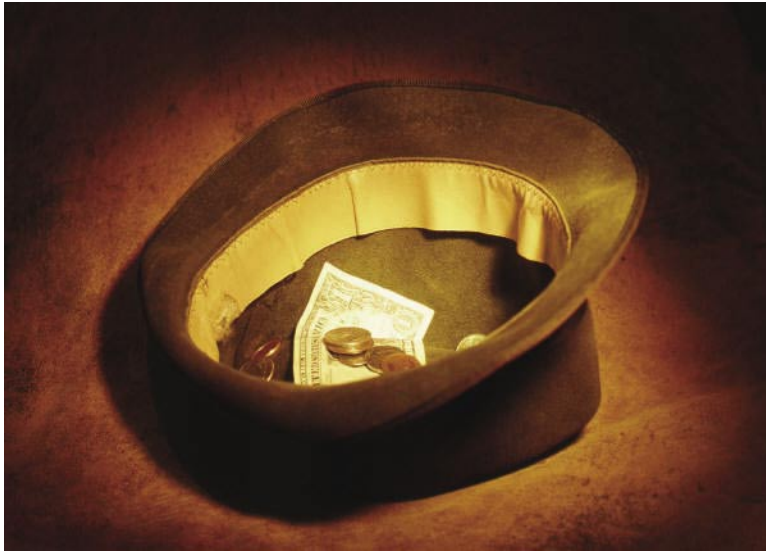
How about state-to-state comparisons? Again, we have differences. Poverty characteristics have a

State-by-State Poverty Rates – 2004*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

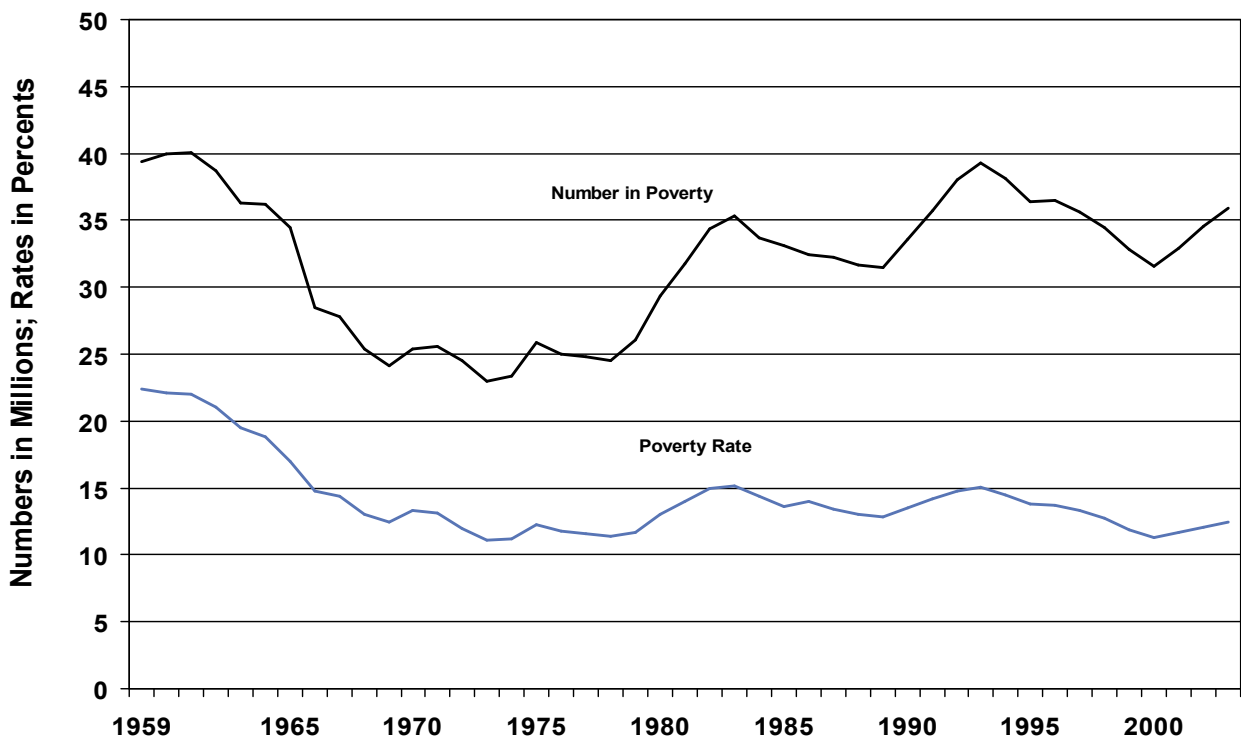
* 3-year average



tendency of congregating in this country. There is a band of high poverty rates across the nation's south-central portion, stretching from New Mexico to Alabama. These states have poverty rates of 15 percent or higher. Conversely, there is a swath of lower poverty rates stretching across the middle of the country, going from Nevada to Iowa and Minnesota. There is also a pocket in the heavily-populated northeast corridor, from Virginia to New Hampshire.

Does the economy dictate the level of poverty? Logic would imply yes, but reality says not always. Poverty rates rose during the recessions of the early 80s and 90s, as one would expect, and the rate came down during the technology boom of the late 1990s. Yet, to add some contrast to the mix, the stagflation years of the late 1970s saw some of the lowest poverty rates measured since 1959. ⓘ

Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate, United States: 1959 - 2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau